



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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By: Airman 1st Class Francine St. Laurent

Alaska Air National Guardsmen support those who have served

FAIRBANKS, Alaska—Veterans rushed to have their blood sugar tested before flocking to enjoy a hearty breakfast prepared and served by members of the 168th Air Refueling Wing. It's all part of the Veteran Stand Down, held Aug. 17 in Fairbanks, aimed to help local veterans with a variety of services.

The Veteran Stand Down, located at Pioneer Park Civic Center, is organized by a group of community members, agencies and businesses who donate supplies and funds used to purchase food and follow-up medical care, said Nancy Smoyer, who began organizing the event 15 years ago.

Since the event's conception, the 168th Medical Group has led the medical component each year. Roughly 160 patients received medical, optometry, dental and podiatry exams this year.

Airman 1st Class Taylor Runyon, 168th Medical Group aerospace medical technician, administered blood sugar and cholesterol tests. For her, giving the best possible care to veterans is a Saturday well spent.

"The military is a big part of our community in Fairbanks and North Pole," Runyon said. "Going out and helping the area that we live in is something I think we sign up for as military members."

Smoyer describes the event as a one-stop shop.

"The services are brought together and it's easier for them to get their needs met," Smoyer said.

Approximately 465 people picked up clothing items such as socks, heavy coats, boots, gloves and fleece pants, according to Heidi Mattson, Fairbanks Vet Center team leader. Sleeping bags, laundry bags and waterproof bags were also provided.

From medical to legal, mental health, counseling and taxes the Stand Down follows a tradition of helping those who have served sort things out and rest. It provides a place for veterans to gather and catch up.

"A lot of them are getting to a point where they're losing people in their lives as they get older and coming out and interacting with people in uniform who have that camaraderie with them, something similar that we all share, is good for them," Runyon said.

George Shoogukuwuruk, who served as a cook in the Marine Corps and Army from 1968 to 1984, said he feels veterans receive more recognition today than before the Iraq War began in 2003.

"This is really helpful for veterans because some of us veterans weren't treated right, and now years later, they are trying to make up for that," Shoogukuwuruk said.

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Cutlines:

11- Airman 1st Class Taylor Runyon, 168th Medical Group aerospace medical technician, administers a blood sugar test at the Veteran Stand Down Aug. 17, 2013. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Francine St. Laurent/Released)

21 - Capt. Jonathan Gerik, 168th Medical Group dentist, performs a dental screening to determine whether follow-up care is needed at the Veteran Stand Down Aug. 17, 2013. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Francine St. Laurent/Released)

38 - Senior Airman Courtney Higley, 477th Aerospace Medical Dental Flight optometry technician, screens a veteran for eye health during Veteran Stand Down in Fairbanks Aug. 17, 2013. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Francine St. Laurent/Released)